Feb. 3, 2010 — -- The CIA provided this statement in response to Wednesday's ABC News report on the 2001 Shootdown of Plane Carrying American Missionaries Over Peru

Statement from CIA's Office of Public Affairs on the 2001 Peru Shootdown

The program to deny drug traffickers an "air bridge" ended in 2001 and was run by a foreign government. CIA personnel had no authority either to direct or prohibit actions by that government. CIA officers did not shoot down any airplane. In the case of the tragic downing of April 21st, 2001, CIA personnel protested the identification of the missionary plane as a suspect drug trafficker.

Shortly after the tragedy, CIA's Inspector General and the Department of Justice began a joint investigation. This episode was also reviewed by the Senate Intelligence Committee. The Department of Justice declined to prosecute any CIA official in February 2005. With that decision made, the Office of Inspector General delivered its report in August 2008. In December 2008, after reviewing the document, CIA Director Hayden convened an Agency Accountability Board.

The Accountability Board conducted its own thorough review. While it found that procedures associated with this counternarcotics initiative eroded over time, it found no evidence of a cover-up. Director Panetta, upon reviewing the Accountability Board's work, issued sanctions for 16 individuals, including current and former Agency officials. Those sanctions were for shortcomings in reporting and supervision. The Board also determined that "reasonable suspicion"—the basis on which to identify a plane as suspect—was established in every shootdown except that of April 21st, 2001, when, tragically, innocent lives were lost. The Board concluded that no CIA officer acted inappropriately with respect to the 2001 shootdown.

This program, now long over, has been looked at very carefully, inside and outside the CIA. The Agency has briefed the oversight committees of Congress on the actions the Agency has taken in this matter. Any talk of a cover-up, let alone improper attempts to persuade the Department of Justice not to pursue prosecutions, is flat wrong. This was a tragic episode that the Agency has dealt with in a professional and thorough manner. Unfortunately, some have been willing to twist facts to imply otherwise. In so doing, they do a tremendous disservice to CIA officers, serving and retired, who have risked their lives for America's national security.